

## **The Green Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd**

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Green politics and economics, in praxis, at times call for measures that require collective consciousness and action. In the current prevailing atmosphere of democratic-liberal consensus, it is sometimes difficult to speak against the rhetoric of 'freedom' without being accused totalitarianism. To aid our work, it is helpful to understand a philosophical framework that transcends the dialectic which puts freedom against interconnectedness, both of which, if understood correctly, are key green values.

In this article, we introduce the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea initiated by Herman Dooyeweerd, and make connections to the body of green thought developed in the last century. Herman Dooyeweerd (born 1894; died 1977) was a Dutch jurist, who trained himself into philosopher during his research in jurisprudence. Whilst he was alive, he was a Christian in the Reformed tradition, and aligned himself with the Anti-Revolution Party in the Netherlands. His magnum opus, *A new critique of theoretical thought* [Dooy1955], had three volumes, each with

a descriptive title: The necessary presuppositions of philosophy; The general theory of the modal spheres; The structure of individuality of temporal reality. Here we go through each of the volumes to point out the connection between Dooyeweerd's insights and those of other green thinkers.

In the first volume, the necessary presuppositions of philosophy, Dooyeweerd surveyed the schools of Western philosophy. Results from his survey indicated that each of them belonged to one of the four ground-motives (GM): the GM typical of Ancient Greek thought setting matter against form; the Hebrew, or biblical GM of Creation-Fall-Redemption; the Scholastic GM setting nature against grace, popularized by Thomas Aquinas; and the Enlightenment dialectic of nature against freedom. He concluded that no philosophical school can do away with the need of an archê, an Archimedean point, on which the theoretical thought can rest. In this, he denied the possibility of an immanent (self-contained) philosophy, and claimed that there is always a presupposition in philosophy. Here we note that except for the biblical GM, the other three are dualistic, and are at risk of antinomy (contradiction) due to their internal dialectic.

The current state of political-economic affairs displays the dominance of the 'freedom' side of the fourth GM, which flourished after the Enlightenment: Liberals such as John Rawls [Ridd1999, Rawl1999] and followers present the Market-Democracy as simply a set of non-evaluative procedures, a meta-ideology that allows personal preference to flourish. The individual are seen as unconnected atoms (an anathema to true green thought) who can only find fulfilment in expressing a preference either in the efficient market, or in the liberal democracy. This flattened political landscape in Europe (and in particular the United Kingdom and Germany), where the political parties have come to forsake their founding ideology, but simply look for 'evidence-based policy' and apply the rhetoric of 'preference', 'choice', and 'the (efficient) Market'. They claim that the Market-Democracy is neutral.

Intuitively, the greens know this is not the case. Against the mainstream rational-(neo)liberal claim on neutrality, there has been some green (and some leftist) reactions. Michael Paul Gallagher asserts that culture is far from neutral [Gall1997, Gall2005, Peel2005]. Slavoj Žižek wants to bring real politics back [Žižek2005]. Rupert Read, a Green councillor of Norwich, wants to bring economics back as a social study,

not as a science (which claims to be rational and neutral) [Read2007]; in fact, even science is not neutral [Test2005]. Tom Burke wants real politics rather than Bjørn Lomborg's 'neutral' scoring functions in the Copenhagen Consensus: 'Cost-benefit analysis can help you choose different routes to a goal you have agreed, but it cannot help you choose goals. For that we have politics.' [Burk2004].

However, it is difficult to argue against freedom without a framework. The liberals quickly brand anyone against freedom to be a totalitarian. This is not surprising, for it is a display of the antinomy within the Enlightenment GM of nature–freedom. The greens who fall into this trap quickly find themselves either becoming totalitarian (idolatry of the national spirit or some such; hark the half-humorous but genuinely-scary call for a green authoritarian dictatorship that occasional come up in our discussion [Lato2005]) or becoming animistic (Nature-worshipping) or Romanticist; all traits of the nature half-GM that opposes the freedom half.

Dooyeweerd's work provides a refuge against such dialectic/dualistic antinomy. It is possible to understand the individual's connectedness without obliterating the freedom. Indeed, true freedom, in the sense of the full development of the individual, is impossible without the community, as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* recognized in Article 29.1 [UDHR1948]. The Green Party of England and Wales have been wrestling with this insight, and with the civil-libertarian tendencies, in the Responsibilities and Rights section of its Manifesto for a Sustainable Society [MfSS2002]. For Christians who share Dooyeweerd's faith, they find the rock, their archê, in Christ; this follows from the biblical GM. In any case, for greens to argue with liberals on the basis of rational neutrality is untenable for two reasons: one, it is not honest; two, the greens are not likely to win the argument. In fact, this is one area the greens have more in common with other political tendencies than the liberals: any party genuinely based on some value (any value!) will find it more sensible to operate in real politics rather than a set of non-evaluative procedures.

In the second volume, the general theory of the modal spheres, Dooyeweerd listed fifteen modal aspects, in which human beings function. The health (or freedom, or development, or shalom) depends on functioning well in each aspect. The listing may be overwhelming at first, but will quickly show itself to be useful, as human beings function in all the 15 modes. The modal aspects are (with some meaning 'kernels' for clarity): 1 Quantitative, 2 Spatial, 3 Kinematic, 4 Physical (energy and mass), 5 Biotic (life functions), 6 Sensitive (sense, feeling), 7 Analytical (distinction), 8 Cultural (formative power), 9 Lingual (symbols), 10 Social (interaction), 11 Economic (frugality), 12 Aesthetic (harmony), 13 Juridical (what is due), 14 Ethical (self-giving), 15 Pistic (vision, commitment, creed). It is not possible to go into each of the aspects in detail here; for now it is

enough to note that these correspond roughly to the list of faculties in a well-formed university [Bran2005].

Dooyeweerd, following an earlier Dutch philosopher Abraham Kuyper, insisted on sphere sovereignty, and argued against reductionism, which is the absolutization of a certain modal aspect: He took it to be idolatry. Sadly, many modern ideologies are exactly this kind of absolutizations. For example: Darwinism, including the social variant and neo-Darwinism, absolutizes the physical aspect and violates the sphere sovereignty of the biological, cultural, and social aspects; productionist ideologies such as Marxism and (neo)liberalism exalts the economic aspect and violates the cultural, etc.

Kuyper and Dooyeweerd explained that there are laws within each sphere and specific to it. The school of philosophy takes its name thus, 'cosmonomic': that is, laws for the cosmos. Our everyday speech corroborates this: we speak of the laws of physics, the laws of economics, the laws of ethics, none of which can fully explain another. It would not be wise to close the departments of economics and sociology (say) in

a university, on the account that biology and physics (say), with their Darwinism, can sufficiently overtake these disciplines. Here is commonsense made explicit by Dooyeweerd.

Often, greens are identified as people who take a holistic view of things. But just as often we face the problem of not being sure of having consulted the full set of stakeholders and not considered every aspect. This is where the rigour of the modal aspects can help. It is not the fuzzy variant of holism, but philosophy as interdisciplinary studies. The list above provides a useful checklist to think through. It is likely that we can develop a system Christian-green thought and a system of Christian-green policies based on the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea in general, and the theory of modal aspects in particular.

Here is a live problem that has not totally been thought through, where the theory of modal aspects may help. In the European Union, and in the devolution of the United Kingdom (amongst others), the idea of subsidiarity, (first appearing in Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, 79 and 80 [Pius1931] and brought into green thought by E. F. Schumacher [Schu1973]) asks for each of the competences to be given to the most-appropriate level of governance. But how do we determine which competence is most appropriate for which level? The modal aspects may be able to sort through the competences, and the idea of sphere sovereignty may provide a test.

In the third volume, *The structure of individuality of temporal reality*, the question is: 'What is a thing?' This is an explanation of ontology. For example: 'Is there such a thing as society?' (See, for example, [That1987]). Another popular word recently is 'ubuntu', one of whose explanation is 'I am because we are' (attributed to Bono by Bob Geldof [Geld2005]), and also used by Archbishop Desmond Tutu [Tutu2004] and Satish Kumar [Kuma2004]. But what does this mean? Is each of us a drop in the ocean?

The Christian response, as explained by Dooyeweerd, is a resounding 'No!'. But we are not absolutely free individuals (as seen in rational thought either). This is very green: It is interconnectedness (a green keyword) without surrendering the self, or forgoing responsibility.

Here the idea of 'right relations', appearing in many other contexts (a popular one being Part 3 Section 2 of the Catholic catechism [Cate1993]), echoes with Dooyeweerd's thought.

It is when we have right relations with our archê, with each other, and with ourselves, in all modal aspects, that we have shalom (or salaam, or peace, or freedom, or health). So, for a green, the question to be asked is not 'Should this iguana have the same rights as I do?', but 'What is the right relation between me and this iguana?' The latter is not only more helpful, but easier to answer. Try this one: What is the right relation between me and an atom? Should I try to split it or fuse

it with another, here on earth, to get vast amounts of energy? A nice attempt to answer this question has been provided by L. Deacon [Deac2005].

And all this is summarized by this ancient exhortation: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' (Mark 12:31)

### **Acknowledgements**

K. T. thanks Dr Magnus Verbrugge and the late Revd Dr Lynn Boliek for guidance; the John Ray Initiative for discussion; and the Reformed churches chaplaincy to the University of Oxford which part-funded this work.

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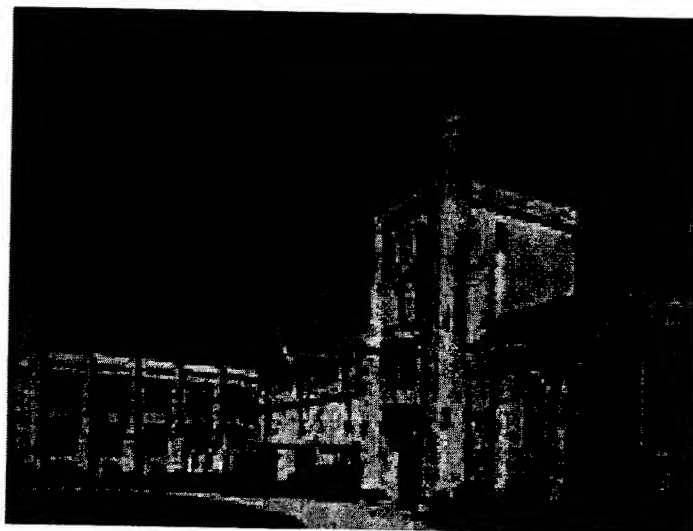
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Green Economics Conference

Mansfield College, Oxford University

Exploring the complex mesh of social and environmental justice

3-4 April 2007



ISBN No: 978-09554646-3-8

Printed and published by the Green Economics Institute

[www.greeneconomics.org.uk](http://www.greeneconomics.org.uk)

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Proceedings of the second Green Economics conference at Oxford University, 3-4 April 2007

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